

## The Reflections of The Bosnian War on Turkish Poetry Within the Framework of War-Literature Affinity

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**Abstract:** The Balkans, which deterritorialized from the Ottoman geography to a great extent as of second constitutional period, taken up in Turkish literature with various aspects. The Balkan societies, one of the basic issues in the Second Constitutional Period press, were paid closer attention by the Ottoman intellectuals due to the emigrations to Istanbul. The fact that the Balkans deterritorialized from the Ottoman territory paved the way for number of poets and authors, especially the ones popular in the region, to write on the geography. This geography sustained its existence as a basic theme in Republican period literature.

The Balkans, proclaimed their independence following the collapse of Yugoslavia, became a centre of focus for the Turkish intellectuals once again. However, this time the interest shown is lesser than those after the war of the Balkans. The Bosnian war became an effect to increase the gradually declining interest; various poets-writers carried the tragedies in the war to their poems-writings.

In this study, focusing on the Bosnian war, consideration of Bosnia in New Turkish poetry will be examined in the context of war-literature relationship.

**Key Words:** War-Literature, Bosnian War, Turkish Literature, Turkish Poetry

### Introduction

Civilizations have their own exhibitions. Every civilization seeks for opportunities to embroider their spirit on everything and to become immortal by founding new cities which reflect this spirit. Cities can't be conceived without reference to the civilizations they were shaped by. As an assertive civilization, the Ottoman State also formed cities peculiar to itself. However, it used some cities as exhibitions and attempted to embody the whole power of civilization in these cities. In addition to the fact that Istanbul's remembered for being one of those leading exhibition cities, Sarajevo will be one of the first names to occur in mind if we think about what other cities served as exhibition centers. Sarajevo was considered to be important not only because of the strategical location it possessed due to its socio-political importance, but also it was enlivened as fastidiously as possible so that it would display the concept of civilization to the world. As stated by Tanpınar in one of his comments on Orhan Gazi "I see some elements of the poetry of Yunus in Orhan Gazi whenever I tend to turn my face to him.", when we take a stroll in the streets of Sarejova, it is obvious that it makes us feel the existence of a deep rooted civilization. With their central location, some cities in the world determine the destiny of the neighbouring cities. The same goes for Sarejova too. Of course, we can't confine this affluence of civilization to Sarejova only, it is possible to witness this civilization claim and spirit all around Bosnia. The importance of Bosnia regarding this overlaps with the role it has played throughout the historical process.

The Balkan geography met with Turkish culture and civilization before the conquest of a large part of Anatolia, even before the conquest of Istanbul. The fact that some of the important cultural centres of Ottoman were located on this geography demonstrates the role of this geography on the range of civilization under discussion. In the aftermath of the Balkan war, the loss of a greater part of this geography caused trauma in the majority of the Ottoman intelligentsia because of the considerable effect of Balkan geography on the Ottoman. It is possible even to state that within the first half of the 20th century, the first event that brought about discrepancy and disintegration among the Ottoman intelligentsia is Balkan war and the loss of this geography immediately afterwards; the second event is War of Independence. The great impact of the loss of this geography on the Ottoman press also reveals the significance of this geography on Turkish intelligentsia and the Ottoman community. During the period of Turkish Republic also, Balkan geography, especially in the field of poetry, has always sustained its position secretly as a main medium. However, the works of poets who had ties with this geography in respect of their origins embodied the elements of this geography. The writing which was penned after the disintegration of Yugoslavia is pretty insignificant in comparison to the writing which was penned following the Balkan war. It would be right to claim that this was because of the weakened love bonds of Turkish intelligentsia with Balkan geography. However, there were some poets who felt this geography

vivaciously and employed this geography in their poetry. We will analyze the poetry which got shaped around the Bosnian war, especially within the framework of war- literature relationship. Before starting to analyze poetry, it would be better to look at the link between war and literature or the link between literature and war.

## **I-The literature of war- the war of literature**

Theoretical writing penned on the link between war and literature is too little. Texts that were written during the war and that made analysis of the pieces compiled in that period constitute a considerable amount of all the pieces of that period. However, these texts centred on the essence of practice rather than theory. In most of the studies on the link in question, rather than the possibility of this link or how and to what extent it would be, some deductions have been made concerning this tie considering the works of art produced until then.

As mentioned above, because war is one of the fundamental realities of humanity, it is naturally a subject of literature. It is hereby seen that both oral and written literature have emerged around wars both in Western and Turkish literature. From this point of view, the link between literature and war paved the way for the emergence of literature in the form of epic. During the epoch of epic, wars are the main sources of literature. This matter has something to do with the greatness of the role wars have in the lives of humanity. Furthermore, the fact that this period consisted of “people most of which gained their principal values by fighting” (Belge, 1980) ended up with the spread/depiction of war; as a result, this heroism was declared to public by means of literature. In such texts, literature functioned as ‘mediator’. Since these texts aimed at conveying the message, phraseology remained in the background. As human beings survived via wars, the emergence of literature around wars was corollary. While exploring the effect of war on literature Jean Larnac utters that only there was ‘the literature of witchcraft and religion’ during the formation phases of civilizations and the birth of ‘heroic tale’ succeeded this. (Larnac, 1963) ‘Heroic tale’ is based on depicting war via the language of literature.

It is difficult for war to become a source of literature and for the emergence of a high quality war literature due to the ‘value’ given to war by human beings. That is, people haven’t acted impartially in wars and events mostly turned out to be life or death issue. This ended up with emotional positioning. This emotional positioning gave prominence to material but kept aesthetic phraseology in the background. Expressing in a style that it would address our emotions was thought to be enough. That all the works of art, particularly poetry, that appeared as ‘war literature’ in world literature resembled each other to a large scale in term of both phraseology and technical features has something to do with the ‘pragmatist’ approach of people to the subject. However, the fact that wars began to be regarded not only as wars by XX. century and mental transformation humanity underwent gave birth to different attitudes towards war especially in the field of intellectuality. This manner brought along a new ‘war literature’.

Turkish literature has a rich bibliography in terms of the number of works created around war. That the early products of Turkish literature were oral provided a basis for war to be a subject matter of oral products and specifically of epic literature. It is known that Turkic khans took bards to wherever they went, those bards accompanied khans during wars and they told wars orally. While scrutinizing the origins and sources of Turkic literature, Fuad Köprülü mentions the epics that became the elements of oral culture this way as one of the highlighted sources.

Even after the adoption Islam, war continued to be a source of literature among Turks. Pieces written in the form of epic or handed down the next generations verbally took their places in the world of literature as ‘gazaname, gazavatname’. Additionally, literature originating from war arose and in it there were some works like ‘Battalname, Saltukname’ that came out around the names of some heroes like Battal Gazi, Sarı Saltuk. Until the end of the first half of 19. century which can be accepted as the formation years of Modern Turkish poetry, war was dominant in epic, rather than its being an inspiration for independent poetry or prose works. This ended up with the reflection of war on literature only with some particular aspects, not with different sides. In this approach which brought about the rise of monotonous war literature, all the concepts including heroes, elevated points and conversations resemble one another to a large scale. The situation Turkish literature in is the same for Western literature too because ‘until the 19. century it was impossible to see the traces of sparkling products that can be categorized as war literature’. (Belge, 1980) In the writing or epics penned until that era, war had been much like a background setting; rather than the war itself, ‘heroes’ had been discussed. ‘This is related to the quality of war carried out’ (Belge, 1980) during the era mentioned above.

In the light of the evaluations made, pointing out that it is possible to talk of not only one war literature but more than one. We can divide the title of ‘Literature Emerged Around War’ into 3 subgroups:

- (k) Literature emerged during war
- (l) Literature which was penned in the aftermath of war and the plot of which was war
- (m) Literature regarding war as a landmark and scrutinizing it

When we look at the subject considering the classification, we witness that the Bosnian war was transferred to Turkish poetry as lament. This 'lamentation' occurs mostly in the course of war. Thus, it is possible to say that the Bosnian war is an example of literature created in the midst of war, which is mentioned as the first item of the classification shown above.

## **II- 'Humanity' fought in the Bosnian war**

The traces of Rumelia in Turkish poetry before the Bosnian war is visible but there is not much emphasis on Bosnia. The war gives Turkish intelligentsia the chance to recall this civilization. Before proceeding to explore poems, it would be better to make it clear that in most of the texts, Bosnia is depicted as a conventional setting rather than its being a habitat to people. This must stem from the fact that those writing about Bosnia consist of people who have love bonds with Bosnia and see it from a distant perspective but have never seen this geography yet. We had better start examples with the poem of Erdem Bayazıt named 'Writing to Bosnia', which has a distinctive place among all the poetry written about Bosnia in terms of both its content and style.

We are so impotent Bosnia! You stand upright.  
We all humanity  
The parasites of musty civilizations  
Are merely the convicts before you.

Hey Bosnia!  
Your sons  
Onto the granite walls of our hearts  
What do they engrave?  
Hey Bosnia!  
The fate you befall on us  
Is a dead end?  
Or a preface to resurrection?

I'm a Bosnian mother:  
Inscribing these words  
In tar in pitch dark  
To the jawbones of dogs  
To the incisors of Mistirovin  
To the grinders of Papazgali  
To the Sacrament of Reconciliation  
I consign them.

I'm a Bosnian child: -Muslims!  
I consign my song to you.  
Also my hands cut from wrists  
Released into the water  
Of the river flowing towards vast seas. (Bayazıt, 2003, 39)

Erdem Bayazıt wrote this poem in 1994. Poem has been a text which is willing to witness the war. These are the lines of a poet who doesn't keep silent and rebels against it. Bayazıt begins his poem claiming that all humanity including himself did nothing at all against the violence. The succeeding lines develop as sincere admission, remorse and self-questioning stemming from this incapability. The poet who sees the people that did not do anything against things happened in Bosnia as 'the parasites of musty civilizations', puts the blame on Western civilization which is followed like prisoners by all humanity which he calls 'musty civilization'. As can be seen in his other poems, the poet accuses the current Western civilization of acting inhumanely. He describes the people like himself wallowing in Western civilization despite not belonging to that civilization as the parasite impotents of this civilization. Bayazıt perceives Bosnia as a place which is destined to loneliness by musty civilization and thus remains out of this civilization.

In the second part of his poem,

Hey Bosnia!  
Your sons

Onto the granite walls of our hearts  
What do they engrave?

With these lines, he likens the heart of humankind to 'granite wall'. Bosnia is struggling to inscribe to humanity who has lost their humane side but this inscription is challenging because hearts have transformed into granites.

The poet goes on;

Hey Bosnia!  
The fate you befall on us  
Is a dead end?  
Or a preface to resurrection?

He calls out to Bosnia again and expresses that humanity is convicted of this insensitivity. What is remarkable here is the questioning of the writer as to whether this is death or resurrection. Although Bayazit thinks that this is the death of humanity because of their passive attitude, he is questioning whether this is an eternal death or a means of resurrection. The poet implies that ongoing terror will help people behave themselves; therefore, he implicates the hope that humanity can get rid of taciturnity.

Later on, Bayazit makes a Bosnian mother speak first and then a Bosnian kid. That already there is emphasis on the accounting of war with the eye of child in other poems written about Bosnia as well is significant. This may be attributed to the belief that child tragedy's the greatest tragedy of humanity. Bosnian mother:

I'm a Bosnian mother:  
Inscribing these words  
In tar in pitch dark  
To the jawbones of dogs  
To the incisors of Mistirovin  
To the grinders of Papazgali  
To the Sacrament of Reconciliation  
I consign them.

utters her last words on the one hand via these lines; on the other hand she delineates the people who are in the position of hearing her screams. The poet's stressing on 'inscribing these words in tar in pitch dark' is very significant. The lines full of images aim at visualizing the harshness of the tragedy crystal clearly. The use of the expression 'pitch dark' referring to night which is already dark and the lines 'inscribing these words in 'tar' in 'pitch dark' demonstrate the desperate situation and the excessiveness of the tragedy. Her addressee increase the tragedy of the mother. The mother consigns her words 'to the jawbones of dogs'. This is the portrait of a person who is made depend on someone by whom he will be savaged and thus who surrenders. Reminding us that the Secretary General of The United Nations of that period was a priest, The poet criticizes him for being indifferent to the tragedy and he sees him as part of that 'pitch dark'. Towards the final lines of this part of the poem, the mother addresses the conscience of the Christian world. The mother, who entrusts her screams to the Sacrament of Reconciliation by which they confess their sins and regain the grace of God, wants the Christian world to face this tragedy deemed proper to her as well while trying to remove their prior sins.

In the last part of the poem, children, the greatest victims of the tragedy in Bosnia, speak:  
I'm a Bosnian child: -Muslims!  
I consign my song to you.  
Also my hands cut from wrists  
Released into the water  
Of the river flowing towards vast seas.

While the mother addresses the conscience of the Christian world, the child addresses Muslims. The child consigns his 'song' to Muslims, through the lines of which we realize that his wrists are cut and the blood of his wrists mix with the flowing rivers. The 'song' of the child involves hope for future. Child represents hope. However, war fades this hope at a very young age. Just like the last will of someone who dies at a very young age, he desires Muslims to live a long life that he couldn't. Looking at the poem from a broader perspective, on

the one hand, we can see that Bayazit on behalf of humanity is remorseful due to the tragedy; on the other hand, we may say state that this disaster might be the harbinger of a new formation.

Other poems written about Bosnia by and large have followed the framework led by Bayazit. Though some of these poets haven't been able to leave enduring mark in literature, they may be regarded important for the testimony they have given against this tragedy via their writings.

In his poem named 'Resurrection Pain', Ahmet Emin Atasoy discusses the attack made in a bazaar on Sunday during the Bosnian war in a chapter entitled 'Massacre':

There is grand Bazaar in Bosnia  
Here we see the greatest poverty  
The greatness of danger, fear and uncertainty  
On the freezing naked counters  
There sits a silhouette terrifying people  
The silhouette of sniper monsters  
...  
Know that it will be the monument of shame  
The grave dug in the middle of Sarajevo! (Atasoy, 2001, p.488)

By using the expression 'the greatest poverty', the poet wants to mean that being deprived of the humanity is the greatest poverty. As a matter of fact, death caused by the bombs dropped there will remain as the monument of shame.

One of the other writers who wrote poetry on the Bosnian war and whose writings involve poetic value is Hüseyin Yurttaş. His poem entitled 'Lament for Sarajevo' is pretty significant in terms of diction, meaning and sincerity:

I could hear your name but never cared about the passing years  
Everything passed on the mournful fringe of an ash colored dome  
Screaming drops shouldn't have reminded the past, your tears any more  
  
You, Sarajevo, were a city a long way from here  
I'm suffering brownout in Turkey  
As a poet grinding his voice (Atasoy, 2001, p.452)

Initially, the poet expresses his sorrow for being have to look at Bosnia from distance. This feeling, which we can call the sorrow of being apart from Bosnia, is also the reason for the remorse that will be brought up throughout the succeeding lines. The poet laments for being apart/being parted from Bosnia though he should be close. Rendering himself as 'a poet grinding his voice' is the evidence of his rebellious spirit against what Bosnia experiences. In succeeding lines, the poet discusses the casualties of Bosnia in a chronological order and then from the loss during the Ottoman State he passes to today's war:

...  
In the morning you woke up with your hands messed in blood  
Hey Sarajevo! the lost and foster land  
Where is the public? Where is the public?  
Death screams in the sky, entire body infected with epileptic sarcomas  
They have merciless hands pulling trigger  
They have savage eyes looking furiously  
They have brutal feet crushing  
Even the dead, even the dead, even the dead  
  
Too young  
Dying too young Sarajevo.

'In the morning you woke up with your hands messed in blood'. This line suggests that Sarajevo, which is depicted as 'the lost and foster land', is contaminated with blood wantonly. The emphasis on 'in the morning' remind us of the fact that Sarajevo was much like an innocent child who shouldn't have involved in the battle conducted there. The contamination of everywhere with blood is the loss of this city. The loss of the

city is the loss of public. As a matter of fact, by asking Sarajevo 'where is the public?', the poet correlates the absence of public with blood. By the use of 'they', he discusses the brutality of those who shed blood in Bosnia. They are so cruel that they crush even the dead people. Repeating this three times, he attempts to manifest the greatness of the tragedy experienced there. Those who shed blood in Bosnia are so savage that they can't stand even the dead people. These two lines 'Too young/ Dying too young Sarajevo' contribute diversity to the poem in terms of lexical depth and poetic diction. The poet compares Sarajevo to a child and by saying 'dying too young Sarajevo', he means that Bosnia experiences death which it does not deserve. The correlation between the city and child is related to the emphasis laid on innocence and cleanliness discussed at the beginning of the poem. The killing of the city despite all its cleanliness and innocence is the same as infanticide.

In the final part of his poem, the poet expresses his remorse and sorrow for being incapable against the tragedy in Sarajevo:

Sarajevo  
Not my hands, even this poem can't reach you  
Forgive me  
Like a desperate scream in darkness  
I let go my verse.

The poet asks for forgiveness from Sarajevo since even the poem can't reach the city let alone run for help. This is the apology for only being able to scream desperately in darkness.

Throughout the poem entitled 'the Lament of Bosnian Children' which belongs to the same poet, the innocence of children and also the brutal treatment of mankind against this innocence are discussed. In the course of the poem, the children, who are innocent in their own worlds, call people to account for the life they have been forced into:

...  
These kids in fear  
Leaving the gates of the century  
Will ask that striking question  
Will the fingers point at you  
Will their stare Pierce your hearts  
'hey people! Where have you been?  
'Where have you been?' (Yurttaş, 1996, p.130-131)

The poet points out that mankind will definitely account for their indifference against all this atrocity, and children who are left to their own fates will stand upright and call humanity to account by asking 'where have you been?'. What is striking in this interrogation is that their look 'will pierce their hearts'. The stress brings to the fore that humanity won't be able to get rid of the guilt of conscience due to this affront.

Mücahit Koca witnesses this tragedy by including some poems into his book named *The Book of Bosnia* and he questions the indifference of humanity just as the same way other poets do. The portrayal of Bosnia in war drawn by the poet within the framework of realistic sense is significant:

All the streets seem on fire  
Houses are like grave.

No more any solid mosque  
The domes worn through  
The minarets collapsed

Houses, roses are all on fire  
Trees are like fire ascending sky  
Grass fly sparks

Sarajevo is the skeleton town  
Death patrols everywhere. (Koca, 1999, p.26-27)

The above picture of Bosnia in war involves two significant points. The city is delineated as an entire fireground. The fire is so intense that even trees have turned into fire ascending sky. At this point, the poet focuses on two important points regarding the city: skeleton. All this fire has transformed the city into a skeleton. At the end of the poem, saying;

‘What happened in Andalusia came about in Bosnia’  
the poet looks at the tragedy in Bosnia as the continuation of ongoing devastation fulfilled by Western civilization against Eastern civilization throughout the history.

After drawing our attention to the tragedy in Bosnia, Hilmi Haşal calls out humanity to question themselves. The repetition of the following lines;

Murderers

Ask yourselves! (Atasoy, 2001, p. 478)

is an attempt to remind humankind about their humanity. The poet calls out devastators to recall their being humans.

Your pitch dark conscience purify?

In the whirl of inhumanity

From your bloody hands

‘Pitch dark’ is a remarkable phrase. The poet sees devastators as people of ‘pitch dark conscience’ and by using an expression that is a reminiscent of the idiom ‘being brutal’ in Turkish, he reminds people about the deprivation of the sense of being humane. The use of ‘the whirl of inhumanity’ in the succeeding line enriches the meaning. The poet compares the killers to prisoners in the whirl of deprivation of humanity. In deed, they need to be pitied. They are deprived of humanity and they get stuck in the whirl of inhumanity. The use of the idiom ‘bloody hands’ supports the conviction of the killers and the state of their being stuck in the whirl of inhumanity. This idiom which also means the revolving of the killer around his victim gives the message that the criminals in Bosnia won’t be able to get rid of the massacre they carried out and they will be haunted by the blood they shed.

Hilmi Haşal expostulates with inconsiderateness of people to the tragedy in Bosnia in his poem entitled ‘Lament for Bosnia’:

The sunlight of Summer favouring death?

Where is the kindness of civilization?

Sold off the gongs of stoke market

With the intrigues of batten. (Atasoy, 2001, p.503)

The poet thinks that ‘civilization’ is just a discourse, they just think of their interests. Civilization is associated with ‘sold off the gongs of stoke market’ and he claims that because the interest in the tragedy of Bosnia is not money spinner, the interest in it is too low.

Nihat Kayabaşı also makes a Bosnian child speak out in his poem. In his short poem which consists of three parts,

Mummy!Where did the soldiers

kidnap my dad?

Why was my sister locked in the room?

Why were all her clothes torn into pieces?

...

I’m so scared mummy

Take me somewhere

The soldiers don’t know (Atasoy, 2001, p.507)

in a childlike manner, he is questioning the reason behind his father’s being kidnapped, his mother and sister’s being hurt severely by the soldiers of intruders. By manifesting the innocence of the child, the poet highlights the scale of violence. The child expresses the brutality via somehow childish questions. In the last part, although his desire to go ‘somewhere the soldiers don’t know’ sounds like a childish question, actually it shows to what extent a child could be affected by such a tragedy, how deep he could feel it and that he is willing to get rid of the intruders whom he thinks to be the source of everything.

### **III- The beauties of Bosnia**

Arif Bozacı's poem entitled 'Sarajevo' is a good example to show a different approach to Bosnia rather than the framework of war. As highlighted above, since the interest of Turkish poets in Bosnia increased especially after the war in the early 1900s, they dealt with the Bosnia under occupation rather than the Bosnia which is of great importance in terms of its natural and historical diversity. As a consequence, a gloomy and rebellious tone is dominant in poems. In this poem, a recollection of the daily life of the city is depicted:

From the minarets  
Come sounds of prayer calls  
A flower blossoms  
In the pot  
In the window  
Of a house  
  
In Grand Bazaar  
Find their tongues  
Pigeons  
In the first Summer  
In Sarajevo. (Atasoy, 2001, p.442)

In the first stanza, while regarding the sounds of prayer calls as the natural elements of this geography, on the other hand, the poet presents the image of a happy and peaceful city by referring to a blossoming flower in the window of a house. In the second stanza, pigeons cooing in Grand Bazaar are discussed as one of the symbols of Sarajevo. Stating that pigeons find their tongues in Grand Bazaar, the poet completes the portrayal of a peaceful town which he started with prayer calls and flower in the first stanza.

### **Conclusion**

In addition to its being among the first places conquered by Ottoman State, the Balkan geography is of great importance in terms of political and social events happened following the loss of this land as well. The conquest policy of the Ottoman civilization and the loss of this geography which got shaped within the framework of the concept of civilization had great effects on literature; during the period of Republic, this land was employed especially in the works of those who were born in this land and thus had organic ties with it. Even though the battles taking place in the early 1990s just after the demise of the communist bloc drew the attention of Turkish intelligentsia to this land, that interest was too low in comparison to the former one. Love bond between the two lands dwindled away by the passing years. However, there were still some poets and writers who wrote their feelings regarding this geography in the warmth of the loss felt on the first day. The most tragic of all the wars after the demise of the communist bloc was undoubtedly the one carried out in Bosnia Herzegovina. There were reflections of the tragedy of the Bosnian war on Turkish poetry to a particular extent.

The reflections of the Bosnian war on Turkish poetry were penned, mostly in the course of war, as rebellion or sometimes as a lament against what was happening.

The approaches of writers towards Bosnia with respect to war are almost the same. These can be summarized as follows:

9. First of all, the guilty conscience felt because of just watching the tragedy in Bosnia and apology to Bosnia become prominent. Being uneasy due to being able to do nothing against the war, poets express their shame of being obliged to apology only.
10. Passive attitude of humanity, especially Europe, against the tragedy is questioned and the death of humanity is stated.
11. Poets give importance to making specifically children and mothers speak in their poetry. It is possible to attribute this to the fact that war has the greatest impact on these groups. Additionally, the contradiction between the innocence of a child with the evilness of war must be influential on this.
12. Looking at these poems from poetic style, sometimes emotional content may surpass poetic aesthetic. However, it is seen that poetic level and intensive imagery are more dominant in the poetry of some poets like Erdem Bayazıt who has an enduring place in literature.
13. With respect to war-literature relationship, the effects of the Bosnian war on Turkish literature can be looked at mostly within the framework of the literature produced during the war. Considering the poems evaluated in this study, it is clear that most of them were written during the war.



14. In the aftermath of the war, it is seen that Bosnia was taken off the agenda of Turkish poetry, the tragedy experienced after the war wasn't embodied as much as before.

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